

Spouse Employment Agenda for Action

Results of the DoD Spouse Employment Summit

Phoenix, AZ

August 22-25, 2000

Executive Summary

Seeking to enhance military spouse careers, family income, and retention of high quality military personnel, the Department of Defense held its major worldwide Spouse Employment Summit in over five years in Phoenix, AZ, from August 22-25, 2000.

Roughly 120 participants attended the Summit's information and working group sessions. Summit participants included Headquarters, command and installation Spouse Employment Assistance Program (SEAP) employees; civilian personnel professionals; representatives of other Federal agencies and non-profit organizations; and military spouses of all ranks and military Services.

Participants identified over 30 challenges facing military SEAP professionals and customers. These challenges fell into five broad categories: program definition, resources, career continuity, corporate partnership, and marketing. The same themes appeared repeatedly in the products of Summit work groups addressing these issues:

- The desire for a consistent level of staffing, resources and services throughout DoD.
- The desire for additional staff and physical resources.
- The perceived need for fenced funding to achieve resource needs.
- An understanding of the importance of partnerships and marketing.
- A belief that partnership and marketing were issues too big to be addressed at the local level and required DoD management and implementation.

In order to address the perceived and real issues surfaced as a result of the Summit, DoD and Military Headquarters SEAP representatives formed an informal Work Group which meets as often as necessary to exchange information and advance SEAP initiatives. Work Group efforts augment ongoing DoD initiatives in partnering with other Federal Agencies and private industry to enhance spouse employment. These efforts are largely self-renewing, but could benefit from a reaffirmation of DoD support.

The marketing of Military SEAPs and their services appears to be one area requiring a commitment of resources which cannot be accomplished within the context of current DoD and Service initiatives and resources. Therefore, recommend the DASD(MCFP), in conjunction with his counterparts in the Military Departments, explore the possibility of a broad-based, well-resourced SEAP marketing initiative to apprise command and program staff as well as spouses of the resources and assistance available through the military SEAPs.

Introduction

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (DASD/MCFP) Victor Vasquez hosted the first DoD Spouse Employment Summit in five years in Phoenix, AZ, from August 22-25, 2000. The purpose of the Spouse Employment Summit was to help DoD and the Military Departments become more powerfully positioned to take action to enhance military spouse careers, family income, and retention of high quality military personnel.

Spouse employment is a key issue for DoD leadership, because many military personnel make retention decisions based on their families' financial stability. The roughly 60 percent of all military spouses who are part of the labor force contribute between 20 and 40 percent of their families' income, however, military spouses face unique employment challenges. Frequent relocations make it difficult to sustain a career and amass retirement benefits.

In order to increase visibility and broaden the range of resources available to Summit participants, the Summit was held concurrently with the Department's August 22-24 Family Readiness Conference. The Summit offered information sessions on Spouse Preference, Small Business Administration pilot programs and resources, the results of earlier spouse employment demonstration projects, and Army research into the relationship between retention and family income on August 22. In turn, Summit participants were encouraged to take part in Conference information sessions on partnering and program effectiveness August 23. From the afternoon of August 23 through the morning of August 25, Summit participants met in a series of bold and challenging facilitated work sessions to create a powerful course of action for improving military Spouse Employment Assistance Programs (SEAPs).

Roughly 120 of the Conference's 780 participants attended the Summit's information and working group sessions. Summit participants included Headquarters, command and installation SEAP employees; civilian personnel professionals; representatives of other Federal agencies and non-profit organizations; and senior and junior spouses of all ranks and military Services.

Armed with the results of the Junior Enlisted Spouse Survey <<http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mapsite/jrspouse.html>>, local research (Appendix 1), and the results of surveys completed before the Summit, work session participants raised over 30 challenges facing military SEAP professionals and customers. These challenges fell into five broad categories: program definition, resources, career continuity, corporate partnership, and marketing. Participants selected the area in which they wished to work and formed themselves into 13 groups to address these issues.

Work Session Products

The reports of the individual work groups displayed far more similarities than differences, making it most logical to organize the results by category. Each section lists the vision statements of the individual groups (where applicable) and the strategies whereby the groups sought to achieve their goals.

Program Definition: The challenge is the lack of a worldwide, standardized system of spouse employment services including a defined program, clear outcomes and accountability, and appropriate tools.

The vision statements of the two program definition work groups provide a good demonstration of different groups working within the same category producing similar results:

- Spouse and family member employment assistance programs are uniform across Service lines, share a recognizable name, and provide services both person-to-person and on-line.
- A uniform method of providing standardized services across Service lines.

Participants in these groups wanted to ensure that spouses could obtain the same core services with a defined minimum of resources regardless of their branch of Service or installation. To reaffirm this cross-Service continuity and enhance marketing efforts, participants wanted Service locations and offerings to be designated by the same names in all Military Departments. The standardized staff training and certification process currently used for personal financial management staff was cited as a good model for spouse employment assistance programs. Standardized position descriptions, updated and uniform reporting requirements, and enhanced use of technology were also considered priorities. In addition, participants suggested use of a core checklist and incorporating spouse advocates into the reengineering process.

Resources: The challenge is a lack of dedicated resources in our system to address staffing, career development and skills training.

The four work groups dedicated to resource issues approached their vision statements from slightly different angles:

- Every DoD spouse will be afforded the opportunity to develop a career and/or become employed.
- Show us the money.
- A worldwide program with parity and equity that is resource rich, has state of the art technology, and is positioned as a central element in the Armed Forces.
- Adequate funding to support spouse employment assistance programs and services.

All four groups sought program consistency and legislative action to support spouse employment assistance initiatives. Participants wanted full-time, civil service or contract spouse employment personnel equivalent to the GS-11 grade level, and an end to the use of temporary or volunteer workers to meet staffing needs. They viewed funds for additional spouse training and education, and physical and electronic resources comparable to successful commercial employment offices as key to meeting spouse employment objectives. Three of the four groups expressed the belief that these objectives could be achieved through fenced funds, standard program guidance, and increased marketing at all levels. They considered spouse employment success stories as a key marketing tool and suggested local spouse employment summits to elevate awareness of spouse issues at the installation command level and within their local communities.

The fourth group explored the possibility of using the existing training and education, and employment assistance programs of other Federal agencies, specifically Department of Labor. Participants in this group focused on the relationship between spouse employment, retention and readiness as the primary selling point for senior leaders in Congress, DoD and other Federal agencies. They also recommended mobilizing military spouses to solicit the support of their Congressional representatives.

Career Continuity: The challenge is the lack of portable jobs causes spouses to experience a spectrum of career problems.

Participants in the three career continuity work groups agreed that career continuity was the greatest employment challenge faced by military spouses. However, the ways they chose to overcome this challenge followed two distinct paths:

- Implement a DoD standardized career life training program to empower spouses to make educated, informed career decisions in the areas of career research, federal employment and entrepreneurship.
- Activate a Web-based spouse employment nexus to act as a one-stop site for resume registration; current, site-specific jobs; alternative services (skills, training, distance education and job search); and information on self-owned and home-based businesses, telecommuting and global entrepreneurship.

Again participants emphasized the importance of DoD-wide consistency. They felt a career training program could only work if the courses and requirements were the same across the Services. Program staff needed certification to assure the quality of their instruction, and participants needed some stable yardstick of performance to allow staff to make reliable recommendations to potential employers.

Likewise, the centralization of a Web-based job board and on-line training function was viewed as a means of providing consistent employment assistance across Service lines. However, participants wanted local spouse employment program staff to post and remove jobs. This proposed addition to current duties maintained the person-to-person element in the employment assistance program, but as work group participants recognized, would require additional staffing at the local level.

Corporate Connection: The challenge is that we do not think creatively about building partnerships to connect spouses to new and existing jobs.

The activities of this work group dovetailed with those of the Career Continuity groups. This group's vision statement sought to improve spouse employment assistance programs by partnering with corporate America to increase jobs for military spouses.

Participants suggested offering economic incentives and DoD recognition to encourage corporate partnerships, and the creation of a quasi-governmental job agency to manage the partnership process. They believed such partnerships would result in more virtual or telecommuting opportunities, more intern/training opportunities, permit the creation of a dedicated spouse employment job database and new “Spouse to Work” liaison positions at each military installation worldwide.

Marketing: The challenge is that we do not effectively market existing services to spouses or position ourselves well with leadership.

Though each of the four marketing work groups developed a preliminary plan in their Summit materials, two groups addressed marketing as a knowledge issue in their vision statements:

- The spouse employment assistance program is known by all commanders, military personnel and family members so that the primary employment needs of the family can be met upon arrival at each new duty station.
- Make sure that all spouse employment programs across the Services are known, valued resources to spouses, commanders, and DoD employees.
- Provide a successful, in-depth marketing strategy that touches all spouses throughout the military continuum.
- A DoD marketing plan that provides awareness, access, and uses spouse employment.

Again, program participants viewed cross-Service consistency of policy and services as a key to making the Department’s spouse employment assistance program known and attractive to key stakeholders: military and civilian decisionmakers, and potential customers. Also critical, however, was the need to make person-to-person contact with 100 percent of spouses, especially those undergoing permanent change of station (PCS) moves.

Most work group participants felt that the development and implementation of a universal marketing plan was a DoD responsibility, which would require significant contractor support. But installation and command level program staff wanted to provide input to the campaign and any graphic products. They sought a “tool kit” for each installation to augment grass roots marketing efforts. One group also suggested development of a spouse sponsor packet and a more spouse-centered welcome program.

Discussion

The same themes appeared repeatedly in work group materials:

- The desire for a consistent level of staffing, resources and services throughout DoD.
- The desire for additional staff and physical resources.
- The perceived need for fenced funding to achieve resource needs.
- An understanding of the importance of partnerships and marketing.

- A belief that partnership and marketing were issues too big to be addressed at the local level and required DoD management and implementation.

In order to ensure that participants developed their ideas without constraint, DoD and Service Headquarters program staff circulated among the work groups. DoD and Headquarters representatives read work group products as they were recorded, but refrained from public comment. This tactic allowed DoD and Headquarters representatives to surface a key issue -- any spouse employment assistance program marketing efforts must first be directed to installation and command program staff.

Contrary to the almost universal assumptions of Summit participants, the spouse employment assistance program guidance promulgated by DoD and the Military Departments is very consistent. Standard position descriptions (specifically addressing the grade-levels desired by installation staff) were developed and approved by the Services in the wake of the Department's last spouse employment summit in the mid-1990s. However, the existence of consistent guidance and staffing direction does not mean it will be implemented at the installation level. Installation command and personnel must first know and understand the guidance, and then be willing to implement the necessary personnel actions—personnel actions which cannot be implemented or required at headquarters levels.

Where spouse employment assistance programs lacked consistency was with reference to their names. The perceptions created by the different Service names may prevent installation staff—and customers—from seeing the underlying consistency of the programs. Therefore, it may be profitable for brand identity to explore the possibility of reaching agreement between the Services regarding a single name for spouse employment assistance programs.

In addition, many spouse employment assistance program staff appeared unaware of existing Web resources for spouses, including DoD Job Search <<http://dod.jobsearch.org>>, the One-Stop Jobs page of the Military Assistance Program (MAP) Web site <<http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mapsite/onestop.html>>, DoD TransPortal <<http://www.dodtransportal.org>>, and the military-specific entrepreneurial resources of the Small Business Administration < <http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mapsite/onestop.html>>.

The focus on fenced funding reflects a lack of understanding on how the budgeting process works at the macro level. Traditionally, DoD and the Services have eschewed fenced funding because it prevents decisionmakers at all levels from responding to emerging issues. To a certain extent, all personnel support services within a military environment exist by reorganizing and prioritizing their own resources. Family support priorities change based on the relative priorities of various mission-related goals. Today the focus is on economic well-being issues, in which spouse employment plays a large role. But current events in the international arena could force a 180-degree shift in priorities tomorrow. Fenced funding would prevent the reapplication of limited resources to address a new and critical need.

Finally, work group products relating to partnership and marketing reflected a belief that improvements in some areas needed to be made at the Headquarters level before any progress could be made locally. Work group materials suggest several possible reasons for this stance: a

lack of local resources, a lack of understanding of simple but labor-intensive direct marketing tactics, or the natural reluctance of an under-graded employee to take responsibility for a shift in operations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

DoD-wide, spouse employment assistance programs face major challenges in the areas of resources, operations and marketing. Spouses and installation program staff appear to view these issues in a similar light. The challenge at the DoD level is to determine how these issues can be addressed within current funding and organizational constraints.

To meet the Headquarters challenge, the Special Assistant for Personnel Readiness, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, suggested forming an informal work group composed of DoD's senior policy analyst for spouse employment and her counterparts among the Services. The group meets as often as needed to work together to realize the objectives of Summit participants. A list of current work group members is provided as Appendix 2.

To assist in the promulgation of unified spouse employment assistance program guidance, the group began assembling a list of existing policies. When complete, the list (complete with links) will be published on the Employment Station of DoD's MAPsite <<http://dticaw.dtic.mil/mapsite/>>. The list will be used to determine where gaps exist in policy guidance at the Service and DoD level. It will also serve as the basis for future spouse employment assistance policy development. In addition, the work group will explore the regulatory and programmatic ramifications of using the same program name across the Services.

Resourcing will not be an easy issue to address. However, the Headquarters work group will explore what can be done in this area, placing particular emphasis on interagency and public/private partnerships. The suggestion of one Summit participant to consider Department of Labor training and education funds for displaced workers was well-taken and will be investigated.

In one important area, the need for action has been overtaken by events. While preparing for the Spouse Employment Summit, DoD staff began preliminary work on a public/private partnership to provide additional job opportunities for federal spouses affected by PCS moves, increase teleworking and other non-traditional career opportunities, and augment existing spouse employment assistance programs. The concept paper (Appendix 3) bears a close resemblance to the "quasi-governmental agency" proposed by participants in the corporate connection work group.

This public/private partnership received an additional boost from the First Annual Military Quality of Life Summit held at the Chamber of Commerce Building in Washington, DC, October 5, 2000. The Military Quality of Life Foundation established at that summit chose to focus on spouse employment as one of its priority areas. With full Chamber backing, the proposed spouse employment public/private partnership could also result in the career continuity

sought by so many program staff and spouses. DoD will also make every effort to include the input provided by the Summit and, where possible, the direct participation of Summit attendees in the development and implementation of this partnership.

The partnership may also address some of the DoD Spouse Employment Assistance Program's marketing needs, but it should not be seen as a cure-all. Cohesive marketing strategies must be developed at all levels to meet a wide variety of needs. Headquarters work group members will assess the impact of the current lack of "brand identity" for DoD spouse employment services, levels of Service and DoD support for implementation of a high level marketing plan, and take appropriate actions.

In connection with these conclusions, recommend the following:

- The DASD/MCFP sign a letter to his Service counterparts supporting the efforts of the Headquarters Work Group and forwarding a copy of this report to further Military Spouse Employment Assistance initiatives.
- The DASD/MCFP reaffirm his support to internal SEAP initiatives and emerging partnerships in public forums whenever appropriate.
- The DASD/MCFP, in conjunction with his counterparts in the Military Departments, explore the possibility of a broad-based, well-resourced SEAP marketing initiative to apprise command and program staff as well as spouses of the resources and assistance available through the military SEAPs.
- The Headquarters work group continue to pursue Summit-related initiatives in support of DoD partnerships and spouse employment assistance programs (Appendix 4).

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Dyess Spouse Employment Study
Appendix 2	Headquarters SEAP Work Group Participants
Appendix 3	Concept Paper: Portable Careers, Remote Training and Telework for The Spouses of Federal Employees and Military Personnel
Appendix 4	Timeline for Spouse Employment Agenda for Action and the Portable Careers/Remote Training/Telework Partnership

Appendix 1

Dyess Spouse Employment Study

Appendix 2

Headquarters Spouse Employment Assistance Program Work Group Participants

DoD

Jean Marie Ward
Senior Policy Advisor for Spouse Employment and Technology
<wardjm@pr.osd.mil>

Army

Nancy Whitsett
Program Manager for Spouse Employment
Army Community Services
<whitsetn@hoffman-cfsc.army.mil>

Navy

Antigone Doucette
Special Assistant
Navy Personnel Readiness and Community Support
<doucette.antigon@hq.navy.mil>

Ed Roscoe
Program Manager
Navy Spouse Employment Assistance Program
<Ed.Roscoe@persnet.navy.mil>

Air Force

Linda Brown
Chief of Air Force Family Programs, Relocation and Employment
<linda.brown@pentagon.af.mil>

Marine Corps

Erin Walerko
TAMP/FMEAP Program Analyst
Marine Corps Community Services
<walerkoeb@manpower.usmc.mil>

Appendix 3

**Portable Careers, Remote Training and Telework
For the Spouses of Federal Employees and Military Personnel**

Appendix 4

Timeline for Spouse Employment Agenda for Action and the Portable Careers/Remote Training/Telework Partnership

Agenda Item	Task	Projected Completion Date
Program Guidance	• Assemble list of current DoD and Service policy guidance and regulation.	December 1, 2000
	• Post list on MAPsite.	January 31, 2001
	• Complete gap analysis of guidance.	February 28, 2001
	• Begin exploring single program title and branding options.	March 15, 2001
	• Initiate appropriate actions to remedy gaps (begin drafting regulations, instructions, etc.)	April 15, 2001
	• Begin exploring possible standardization of services and certification options.	May 1, 2001
Marketing	• Create electronic mailing list of Summit attendees to provide basis for further research and action.	September 15, 2000 (completed)
	• Draft report on pre-Summit surveys to obtain clearer picture of installations and spouse realities.	December 15, 2000
	• Draft report on best practices detailed in survey and summit materials.	January 1, 2001
	• Disseminate survey and best practice reports through Service chains of command and to mailing list.	February 15, 2001

Agenda Item	Task	Projected Completion Date
Career Continuity and Corporate Connection	Implement first phase of Portable Careers/Training/Telework Partnership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign MOUs with government and private partners. • Establish POCs in initial activation sites. • Develop a dedicated Web-based job bank. • Identify and implement agreements with core partner companies. • Begin research into impact and requirements of proposed non-traditional practices. 	June 1, 2001
	Implement second phase of Partnership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of corporate partners and activation sites. • Evaluate research results. • Finalize Partnership organizational structure. • Initiate Partnership marketing campaign. 	December 1, 2001
	Implement third phase of Partnership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue needed legislative or regulatory changes. • Establish Partnership organization. • Ramp up to worldwide corporate and spouse participation. • Implement appropriate technological solutions for accelerated teleworking. 	December 31, 2003